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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0696
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY 0015
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 9167
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 2948
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 2939
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP 0269
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S E C R E T BOGOTA 003011

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2019
TAGS: PREL MARR MCAP MOPS PGOV PTER KTIA CO
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH MOD SILVA REGARDING UNASUR
SUMMIT AND DCA

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield, Reasons 1.4 (b & d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S/NF) The Ambassador met with Colombian Defense Minister Gabriel Silva during a Colombian Air Force ceremony in Tres Esquinas, Caqueta on September 16, 2009. Silva said that the Government of Colombia (GOC) was satisfied with the outcome of the September 15 UNASUR summit in Quito, Ecuador. Silva noted that he and Foreign Minister Jaime Bermudez had productive informal conversations with their Ecuadorian counterparts, and that the GOC sees an opportunity to drive a wedge between Ecuador and Venezuela. Silva agreed with signing the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) at a low level and without ceremony. He recommended that the USG not seek assurances regarding the future of U.S. contractor immunities, since this could delay the DCA signing by months. Silva offered to resolve any accreditation issues later. Silva expressed dissatisfaction with the progress on the Track II DCA talks and said he plans to raise this issue with Secretary Gates during his U.S. visit in October. Silva affirmed prior GOC assurances not to undertake cross-border operations proximate to the DCA signing. The Ambassador warned that the USG may have to sever ties with the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) given the wire-tapping scandals. End Summary.

GOC SATISFIED WITH UNASUR MEETING

¶2. (C/NF) The Ambassador met with Colombian Defense Minister Gabriel Silva during a Colombian Air Force ceremony in Tres Esquinas, Caqueta, on September 16. Silva commented that the September 15 UNASUR summit in Quito, Ecuador had gone well from the GOC perspective. While the GOC did not secure agreement to expand the scope of the meeting to include all security agreements in the region, it was able to avoid any UNASUR statement on the DCA.

¶3. (C/NF) Silva described Chile, Peru, Uruguay, and Paraguay as generally supportive of Colombia at the meeting. He noted

that even the difficult Argentine Defense Minister was moderate. Silva said, however, both he and FM Bermudez were perplexed by Brazil's behavior. He described Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim's behavior as "rabid," but noted that Defense Minister Nelson Jobim was more moderate. Silva said he could not tell if the two were playing "good cop/bad cop," or if Amorim was serious. Silva said he plans to sound out Jobim on the issue. Silva noted that at one point he told the Brazilians that if they did not adopt a more balanced approach, Colombia would consider withdrawing from UNASUR altogether. While the GOC agreed in principle to another UNASUR session, Silva said the GOC will not attend until October at the earliest.

¶4. (C/NF) Silva commented that the letter from the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force regarding the Transcom "White Paper Air Mobility Command Global En Route Strategy" was very helpful in Quito. He and Bermudez used the letter to excellent effect during the UNASUR meeting, and it largely defused the issue.

ECUADOR AND VENEZUELA

¶5. (C/NF) Silva and Bermudez had good informal conversations with Ecuadorians during the UNASUR summit. The GOC sees an opening with Ecuador, and wants to drive a wedge between Ecuador and Venezuela. Silva and Bermudez are exploring things they can offer to Ecuador on the DCA and other areas that they do not offer to Venezuela.

¶6. (S/NF) Silva asked what the USG knew about recent Venezuelan flights along the Venezuelan-Colombian border. The Ambassador responded that we believe the Venezuelans flew supersonic flights along the border for nearly a week prior to the August 28 meeting in Bariloche, Argentina --but he was not aware of any flights since that time. Silva stressed that this was an example of why the Colombian Defense Ministry needs a closer intelligence-sharing relationship with Southcom. Silva said he is not satisfied with the current system or structure of our intelligence sharing relationship with the GOC. The Ambassador suggested that Colombian Military Commander General Freddy Padilla broach this topic with Southcom during his trip to Florida scheduled for the following week. On Padilla's return, if Silva is still dissatisfied, the Ambassador suggested that the issue could be discussed in more detail.

DCA SIGNING AND TRACK II

¶7. (C/NF) Silva said the GOC agreed with the U.S. position that the DCA should be signed at a lower level in a "non-ceremony." He stressed that the GOC wants to sign as soon as possible --definitely before the next UNASUR meeting. Silva said that the United States should not seek assurances on the future of U.S. contractor immunities before signing the DCA. He warned this could delay the agreement for months. He suggested that when U.S. contractors enter Colombia post DCA-signing, the Embassy should send over diplomatic notes to the Defense Ministry seeking accreditation of the contractors as usual. He said the Embassy could include the 2003 exchange of diplomatic notes whereby Colombia agreed to grant U.S. contractors limited immunities pursuant to the 1962 Agreement. Silva believed the Ministry of Defense could approve continuing limited privileges and immunities for U.S. contractors as it had in the past.

¶8. (S/NF) Silva said he was not satisfied with Track II progress and plans to raise this issue with Secretary Gates during his October 26-29 visit. The Ambassador replied that the USG still had not received responses to its letters regarding the Track II issues, and encouraged Silva to have the recipients formally accept the U.S. offers. The Ambassador noted that after receipt of the replies, it may be possible to schedule dates for the air defense assessment team and for initial stockpile agreement talks before his

U.S. visit. Silva stressed that the Track II package would not be presented to the Council of State ("Consejo de Estado"), which is currently reviewing the DCA. Silva also expressed interest in meeting with Secretary Clinton during his upcoming U.S. visit, but indicated he would check with FM Bermudez first.

NO CROSS-BORDER OPS, PGM LANGUAGE

¶9. (S/NF) Silva reiterated his earlier commitment that the GOC would undertake no cross-border operations before, during or in the aftermath of the DCA signing. The Ambassador advised that he would bring this issue up with President Uribe at a meeting on September 21. Silva noted that President Uribe would deliver the same response.

¶10. (S/NF) Silva asked if the Ambassador had received General Padilla's revised letter to the Ambassador with precision guided munition (PGM) assurances in relation to a recent Foreign Military Financing acquisition. The Ambassador responded that he had not seen the revised letter. Since three weeks had passed, he asked if there could be a problem. Silva responded that the delay was purely bureaucratic. He said he had made a few changes to Padilla's draft, and that the Ambassador should be receiving the revised letter soon.

He said the letter would include the language the Ambassador had suggested.

DAS MELTDOWN

¶11. (C/NF) The Ambassador commented that he planned to engage President Uribe regarding the ongoing Administrative Department of Security (DAS) wire-tapping scandals. The Ambassador noted there was a real possibility that the United States would have to sever all ties with DAS. If so, the Colombian National Police and the Armed Forces might have to serve as replacements for some essential functions previously performed by the DAS. Silva said he wanted to discuss the issue in more detail before transferring any DAS functions. Silva later followed up with a call to the Ambassador on September 17, stating that the GOC would "amputate" the DAS and move most of its functions to other parts of the government.

Brownfield